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PTQ7214

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D), B6PAGE 01 CARACA 03879 01 OF 03 042204Z
ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DINT-00	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-00	CAC-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	DCP-01	NSAE-00	OCS-03	OMB-01	DHS-00	OPIC-01	PA-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02
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R 042107Z DEC 02
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8836
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
NSC WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 003879

NSC FOR LLORENS
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2012
TAGS: PGOV, PINS, ASEC, CASC, ELAB, VE
SUBJECT: STRIKE CONTINUES AS OPPOSITION MARCHES

CLASSIFIED BY: CLASSIFIED BY DCM FREDERICK B. COOK.
REASONS 1.5 (B) & (D).

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SUMMARY

1. (C) THE SEESAW POLITICAL BATTLE BETWEEN THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION CONTINUED WITH THE THIRD DAY OF A NATIONAL STRIKE DECEMBER 4 AND A LARGE OPPOSITION MARCH IN CARACAS TO DELIVER A DOCUMENT TO OAS SEC GEN GAVIRIA PROTESTING THE GOVERNMENT'S REPRESSION OF A PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION. PROTESTS ALSO OCCURRED IN SEVERAL STATE CAPITALS. THE STRIKE IS BEGINNING TO AFFECT OPERATIONS OF PETROLEUM OF VENEZUELA (PDVSA), BUT SOME OF THE ECONOMY IS BACK TO NEARLY NORMAL. MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS TRYING TO REMOVE ONE SUPREME COURT JUSTICE, WHILE THE OPPOSITION-CONTROLLED NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL FIRMLY REITERATED ITS DECISION TO HOLD A CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM ON FEBRUARY 2. THOUGH TWO SIDES MET TO DISCUSS FORMAL RESUMPTION OF TH GAVIRIA-LED TALKS, NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT NOR THE OPPOSITION APPEARS READY TO BACK DOWN. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SAID TALKS WON'T RESUME UNTIL THE STRIKE ENDS. PRO AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE, BUT AS OF THIS TIME NO ANNOUNCEMENT ON EXTENDING THE STRIKE HAS BEEN MADE. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION MARCH TO OAS NEGOTIATION SITE

2. (C) THE SEESAW POLITICAL BATTLE BETWEEN THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES WITH THE THIRD DAY OF
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A NATIONAL STRIKE DECEMBER 4. THOUSANDS OF OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS LED BY ALIANZA BRAVO PUEBLO PARTY LEADER ANTONIO LEDEZMA, FEDECAMARAS PRESIDENT CARLOS FERNANDEZ, AND CONINDUSTRIA PRESIDENT LOPE MENDOZA AND OTHERS MARCHED TO THE HOTEL MELIA TO GIVE OAS SECGEN CESAR GAVIRIA A DOCUMENT PROTESTING THE NATIONAL GUARD'S TEAR GASSING OF A PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION DECEMBER 3 AT PETROLEUM OF VENEZUELA (PDVSA) AND CALLING FOR A DECISION FROM THE "TABLE OF NEGOTIATIONS AND AGREEMENTS" ON ELECTIONS. LEDEZMA TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE OPPOSITION WANTED THE NEGOTIATORS "TO DEFINE THE ELECTORAL ROUTE" THAT WOULD SOLVE THE POLITICAL CRISIS. THE DOCUMENT ALSO CALLS UPON THE OAS TO APPLY THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER TO VENEZUELA. APPROXIMATELY 2,000 GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS STAGED THEIR OWN RALLY AT PLAZA O'LEARY NEAR MIRAFLORES PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. THE OPPOSITION STAGED MORE DEMONSTRATIONS IN SEVERAL STATE CAPITALS, INCLUDING THE OIL PRODUCTION CENTER OF MARACAIBO, WHERE SOME LOOTING OCCURRED DECEMBER 3.

THE STRIKE'S IMPACT ON PDVSA

3. (C) WHILE THE POLITICAL PROTESTS HEATED UP, FEDECAMARAS ASSERTED THAT STRIKE PARTICIPATION HAD STRENGTHENED IN PDVSA AND ELSEWHERE. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS THAT THE FLOW OF GAS TO PROVIDE POWER FOR THE PARAGUANA REFINERY COMPLEX HAS BEEN CUT BACK AND THAT PLANT MANAGERS ARE NOW CONSIDERING SHUTTING THE COMPLEX DOWN ON SAFETY GROUNDS. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS THAT THE EL PALITO AND PUERTO LA CRUZ REFINERIES ARE NEARING

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SHUTDOWN. PDVSA ACTIVITIES IN MARACAIBO HAVE SLOWED TO A
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CRAWL (IF NOT A FULL STOP), INDUSTRY SOURCES SAY, AND
SHIPPING INTO LAKE MARACAIBO HAS BEEN HALTED BY A SLOWDOWN BY
SHIP PILOTS. HOWEVER, VIGOROUS EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT PDVSA'S
CONTINGENCY PLAN MAY DELAY A FULL-SCALE ENERGY CRUNCH. WITH
RESPECT TO THE DOMESTIC GASOLINE MARKET, NO SHIPMENTS HAVE
BEEN MADE TO CARACAS OR PUERTO CABELLO FOR A DAY AND A HALF,
ACCORDING TO INDUSTRY SOURCES. REPORTS FROM THE PRIVATE
SECTOR INDICATE THEY MAY HAVE AS LITTLE AS THREE DAYS OF
STOCKS, DEPENDING ON DEMAND LEVELS. (SEE SEPTTEL FOR FURTHER
PDVSA DEVELOPMENTS.)

4. (C) OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ECONOMY REMAIN UNCHANGED SINCE
DECEMBER 2, WITH THE STRONG ADHERENCE TO THE STRIKE BY THE
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR NOT MATCHED BY RETAIL COMMERCE. OUR TAKE ON
OTHER KEY SECTORS:

-- AIR AND GROUND TRANSPORTATION: INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ARE
RUNNING, BUT MOST DOMESTIC FLIGHTS ARE CANCELED. IN CARACAS,
TRAFFIC IS STILL FAR BELOW NORMAL. BUS AND METRO SERVICES ARE
OPEN. DUE TO LACK OF DEMAND, GASOLINE SHORTAGES AT THE PUMP
HAVE NOT YET OCCURRED.

-- BANKING AND FINANCE: ACCORDING TO THE BANKING
ASSOCIATION, APPROXIMATELY 50 PCT OF BANKS ARE OPEN, WITH
INDIVIDUAL BANKING FIRMS MAKING THEIR DECISIONS ON THE BASIS

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DINT-00	DODE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 CARACAS 003879

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OF DEMAND, SECURITY, AND AVAILABILITY OF WORKERS. FOREIGN
EXCHANGE HOUSES AND THE STOCK EXCHANGE ARE CLOSED. THE
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BOLIVAR REMAINS STABLE, TRADING AT 1321/DOLLAR.

-- POWER: ELECTRICITY OF CARACAS, THE U.S.-OWNED POWER
GENERATOR/DISTRIBUTOR, IS OPERATING NORMALLY, BUT [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ADVISED ECONCOUNS THAT DEMAND THROUGH THE STRIKE
HAS BEEN "COMPARABLE TO A SATURDAY."

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CNE REITERATES DECISION TO HOLD REFERENDUM

5. (U) WITH A 4-1 VOTE IN FAVOR, THE DIRECTORS OF THE
NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) ANNOUNCED DECEMBER 3 THE
DATE FOR THE CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM ON WHETHER CHAVEZ SHOULD
RESIGN WOULD BE FEBRUARY 2. THE CNE REVIEWED ITS PREVIOUS
DECISION TO FIX THE DATE THAT ONLY RECEIVED 3 AFFIRMATIVE
VOTES AND WAS DECLARED UNCONSTITUTIONAL BY THE SUPREME COURT
THE FOLLOWING DAY ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE DECISION MUST BE A
"QUALIFIED" MAJORITY OF FOUR. CNE BOARD MEMBER [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 3 THE TSJ'S RULING WAS A BLATANT
POLITICAL PLOY BY THE GOV TO BLOCK THE REFERENDUM. [REDACTED]
ASSERTED THAT THE CNE'S DECISION ON THE REFERENDUM DATE
CONFORMED TO THE NEW ORGANIC ELECTORAL LAW (LOPE). CNE BOARD
MEMBER ROMULO LARES HAD OPPOSED THE RECENT CNE DECISION
SELECTING THE REFERENDUM DATE. LARES SUDDENLY REVERSED
HIMSELF ON DECEMBER 3, VOTING AS PART OF NEW "QUALIFIED
MAJORITY" TO RECONFIRM THE FEBRUARY 2, 2003 REFERENDUM DATE.

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MVR TRIES TO IMPEACH SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

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6. (C) MEANWHILE, THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VOTED DECEMBER 3 TO SACK SUPREME COURT JUSTICE FRANKLIN ARRIECHE FOR COMMITTING "IRREGULARITIES" AND FALSIFYING HIS CURRICULUM VITAE THAT QUALIFIED HIM FOR THE POST. (NOTE: ARRIECHE WROTE THE DECISION ACQUITTING FOUR GENERAL MILITARY OFFICERS ON REBELLION CHARGES LAST APRIL. OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS BELIEVE HIM THE FAVORITE TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT DECEMBER 12 TO REPLACE THE MORE PRO-CHAVEZ IVAN RINCON.) ALTHOUGH [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 3 THAT A SIMPLE MAJORITY CAN DEPOSE THE MAGISTRATE, OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS INSISTED THAT, ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 265 OF THE CONSTITUTION, A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IS REQUIRED.

STRIKE PRECLUDING FORMAL DIALOGUE

7. (C) MEMBERS OF THE GOV AND OPPOSITION NEGOTIATING TEAMS MET DECEMBER 4 TO DISCUSS FORMALLY RESTARTING THE GAVIRIA-LED TALKS. MEETING TODAY WERE RAFAEL ALFONZO (FEDECAMARAS), MANUEL COVA (CTV), TIMOTEO ZAMBRANO (ALIANZA BRAVO PUEBLO), AND EDUARDO LAPI (GOVERNOR) FROM THE OPPOSITION AND ARISTOBULO ISTURIZ (EDUCATION MINISTER), MARIA CRISTINA IGLESIAS (LABOR MINISTER), AND NICOLAS MADURO (MVR DEPUTY).

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] ZAMBRANO TOLD REPORTERS DECEMBER 4 THE GOV TEAM SHOULD RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE IN SPITE OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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STRIKE AND WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE STREETS. MADURO COUNTERED ZAMBRANO, SAYING THAT THE GOV TEAM WOULD NOT RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL THE OPPOSITION LIFTS THE STRIKE.

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS ISSUE COMMUNIQUE

8. (C) THE "LIFE FORUM" COMPRISED OF ABOUT 35 NON-GOVERNMENTAL VENEZUELAN ORGANIZATIONS, WILL BE RELEASING A PUBLIC DOCUMENT CONDEMNING THE ACTIONS OF THE GOV AND THE NATIONAL GUARD FOR THEIR ACTIONS AGAINST OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS GATHERED IN THE STREETS OF CARACAS, ACCORDING TO [REDACTED]

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TOLD POLOFF DECEMBER 4 THAT AS PART OF THE "LIFE FORUM" THEIR ORGANIZATION HOPES THE DOCUMENT WOULD REACH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND RAISE AWARENESS OF THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA.

COMMENT

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